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BEL AND THE DRAGON.

BY WILLIAM HAYES WARD,

New York City.

The composite monster in Assyrian art usually called the dragon is a quadruped with the head and forepaws of a lion, a body covered with scaly feathers, two wings, and the hind legs and feet of an eagle. The purpose evidently is to represent a destructive spirit,



FIG. 1.—Figure of Bel and Dragon, after *Chaldean Genesis*, opp. p. 62.

whether an evil wind, or pestilence, or general agent of disorder. When appearing in conflict with a deity it was recognized by George Smith (*Chaldean Genesis*, ed. A. H. Sayce, pp. 62, 114) as representing Tiamat in conflict with Merodach, the divine demiurge who reduces to submission the spirit of primeval chaos and evil, and creates out of it a cosmos. This identification of the dragon with Tiamat has been generally accepted, notwithstanding that in the more carefully drawn Assyrian representations the dragon is clearly masculine, while Tiamat was feminine. In the very instance given as above by George Smith, taken from Layard's *Monuments of Nineveh*, Second Series, Pl. V., the serpent-headed phallus is sharply drawn. This bas relief (*fig. 1*) is from Nimroud, and probably of the date of Assurnazirbal, nearly 900 B. C.

The oldest known representation of the dragon is on a shell seal cylinder belonging to the Metropolitan Museum (*fig. 2*), 3500 to 4000 B. C. The dragon is harnessed to a four-wheeled chariot in which is seated the god, whom we may perhaps call the elder Bel of Nippur, hardly the younger Bel Merodach, holding the reins with one hand and brandishing a whip in the other. Between the wings of the dragon stands a naked goddess, whom we may perhaps recognize as Aruru, probably a form of Ishtar, who, according to one form of the creation story, was associated

with Bel in the creation of the human race, holding a sheaf of thunderbolts in each hand. A worshiper stands before a peculiarly archaic form of altar, and pours a libation through the spout of a vase. Out of the open mouth of the dragon there



FIG. 2.—Metropolitan Museum, 201.

emerges what might be a stream, but probably is meant to suggest the forked tongue of a serpent; *cf.* the serpent phallus of the Nimroud figure. The lightnings held by the goddess correspond to the double trident held by Merodach in fig. 1, and the single trident so often held by one of the gods.

Another archaic Babylonian cylinder (of dark-green serpentine, "jasper") belonging to the British Museum has a similar design (*fig. 3*). The god himself stands between the wings of the dragon, who is represented in the same way, with what might be streams issuing from his mouth as if vomiting, but rather representing a forked tongue. The god holds over his shoulder



FIG. 3.—British Museum, N. 1070.

a whip and a club, perhaps an ax, while the other hand carries the curved scimitar weapon derived from a serpent, or more likely a cord attached to the dragon's mouth. This would identify him with the god often conventionally represented on later Babylonian

cylinders as holding a bull or dragon by a cord, in one case with a distinct ring through its nose. Before the dragon is a goddess, not nude, with arms outstretched, entirely enveloped in streams of water. Under her is a bull, being stabbed in the shoulder by



FIG. 4.—British Museum, 54-4-1-4.

a kneeling, bearded hero, naked except for a cord about his waist. Behind him a stream of water is poured out of a vase from the sky. Behind the entire scene is a star in a crescent, a human figure, and a line of inscription.

We have seen in fig. 2 a goddess standing over the dragon. A later hematite cylinder of perhaps 2000–2500 B. C. shows the flounced goddess holding the lightning trident and seated on the dragon, out of whose mouth issues a stream, or forked tongue. The other figures are of the conventional type of the period. The seated goddess (*fig. 4*) is probably the same as appears *en face*



FIG. 5.—British Museum, 69.

in Rich's fine old cylinder, the Ishtar *supra leones* (see Menant, *Glyptique Orientale*, I., p. 163).

In fig. 5, a hematite cylinder of about the same period as fig. 4, Ishtar *en face*, in a flounced dress, holding up a caduceus with

two serpents, stands on two dragons. In the usual conventional form of this goddess she stands *en face* with one bare leg advanced and resting on a single small dragon or lion.

Of the representations of the dragon thus far considered, coming from the period of the old Babylonian empire, any one might be feminine, the sex not being indicated, although indicated in fig. 3 in a bull of the same size.

Another form in which a dragon appears in early Babylonian art is standing rampant, with wings lifted together behind, and with mouth open over the head of a kneeling man or attacking an animal. In fig. 6 the male sex seems to be indicated, although this is seldom the case. The cylinders of this type are usually thick hematites, the oldest of this material going back perhaps to 3000 B. C., and the design is a somewhat frequent one. Here



FIG. 6.—British Museum (no number).

the dragon plainly does not represent Tiamat, overcome and slain by Merodach, or subdued to some other god or goddess, but a destructive demon of pestilence or tornado.

It is not until the Assyrian period that we find a representation of the conflict between the god Merodach and the dragon. The dragon is not now harnessed, trodden on and quite subdued; but with its head facing the god and receiving the fatal blow it turns to flee, as appears in fig. 1, which is from the wall of a small temple. Other instances appear on the Assyrian seals. The best known example is that identified as Bel and the Dragon by George Smith (*Chaldean Genesis*, ed. Sayce, p. 114). This cylinder of chalcedony is the same as had long been figured in Lajard's *Culte de Mithra*, Pl. XXXVII., fig. 4, and now belongs to the Metropolitan Museum (*fig. 7*). As there are several examples of this general design, they may properly be grouped together before giving a general description.

Another (*fig. 8*) is figured in Lajard's *Culte de Mithra*, Pl. XXXIII., fig. 4. It is a small cylinder, of "chlorite terreuse," with border lines above and below the engraved design, contains some scattered cuneiform characters and is distinctly Assyrian,



FIG. 7.—Metropolitan Museum, 403.

or at least northern. The same design appears again on a fine cylinder of "saphirine chalcedony" (*fig. 9*), belonging to Mr. R. I. Williams, of Utica, described by J. Menant in the *American Journal of Archæology*, II., p. 256, who thinks he finds in the inscription evidence that it is a royal cylinder, although he does not read the name of any king. This cylinder may be of a date 700 or 800 B. C. Yet another probably older cylinder is a large serpentine (*fig. 10*) belonging to the Metropolitan Museum. It is in unusually fine preservation, considering its soft material, and is perhaps the most complete representation of the scene that is known. One will observe that the arrow with which the god shoots the dragon is a trident, and so a thunderbolt. Also both



FIG. 8.—Lajard, *Culte de Mithra*, Pl. XXXIII., fig. 4.

the larger and the smaller dragon have a large protruding tongue divided, or forked, at the end.

A broken cylinder figured in the *Collection De Clercq*, Pl. XXXI., fig. 331, is peculiar in that the dragon fleeing from the pursuing deity who is shooting an arrow at him, is met in front

by another deity, or the same deity represented a second time, who thrusts a double thunderbolt in the dragon's face (*fig. 11*). This latter deity has his body surrounded by the circle of rays, the common form of the Assyrian deity whom Lenormant called



FIG. 9.—*Am. Journ. of Arch.*, Vol. II., Pl. V., fig. 8.

Adar, and who may be rather Marduk. Yet another broken cylinder (*fig. 12*), Lajard, XXV. 5, shows Merodach shooting the dragon with a trident arrow. These are all the cylinders I know of in which this scene of the conflict between Merodach and the dragon appears, the latter taking the original form of the composite monster.

Let us now analyze the scene. We first observe that this scene is not old Babylonian, but Assyrian or Mesopotamian. We cannot yet distinguish what in art or mythology had its origin



FIG. 10.—Metropolitan Museum, 402.

in Assyria and what in Nahrina or Mitanni. The latter were brought into closer relations with Egypt, Phenicia, and the Hittite kingdom, and we may suspect that what was new in Assyrian art or mythology was more likely to be borrowed from the districts to the west of Assyria than to be original. It may well be

that the old Babylonian legend of the fight between Marduk and the dragon was quite recast in the north. There is evidence that such was the case. Indeed it took different forms in Babylonia itself. According to the familiar literary version Merodach is the champion of the gods. At the bidding of Ea he accomplished



FIG. 11.—De Clercq, Pl. XXXI., 331.

what no other god dared to attempt. But this is, as Morris Jastrow, Jr., shows in *The American Journal of Theology*, I., April, p. 469, a recension of the story which must be later than the establishment of the dynasty of Hammurabi at Babylon, and the consequent enthroning of Merodach as the chief god. Indeed, an older form of the myth, given in one of the creation tablets, makes the elder Bel of Nippur the deity who subdued Tiamat. It is by no means clear that he killed her, for the cylinders older than Hammurabi, as in figs. 2 and 3, represent the dragon as not slain but subdued, harnessed in a chariot and driven by Bel, while the goddess stands on his back and wields the thunderbolt; or the god stands on the back of the dragon. This dragon may well be Tiamat, as there is no indication of the male sex.

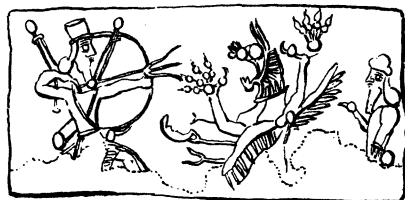


FIG. 12.—Lajard, XXV. 5.

When we come to examine the Assyrian cylinders we find that the dragon is male. This appears in figs. 1, 9, 10. The same idea of the sex of the chaos-monster appears in the Hebrew stories. While **תהום** is either feminine or masculine, the word has lost its relation to Tiamat; and the other words by which the

spirit of disorder is designated, as **רהב** and **תנין**, are masculine. We are therefore not surprised to find that in the Persian mythology, which derived the figure, if not the substance of its dualism from this conflict of Bel and the dragon, the evil serpent Ahriman, the foe of Ahura-mazda, is masculine. In this matter the Assyrian and the Persian agree with the Hebrew notion, but not with the Babylonian. We may also gather that the Hebrew version of the dragon story, whether **רהב** or **תנין**, or the serpent of Genesis does not find its origin in the Babylonia of the times of Hammurabi and Abraham—otherwise they would have been feminine—but in Assyria or Mesopotamia.



FIG. 13.—The Sir Henry Peek Cylinder.

Another point which requires notice in the Assyrian representation of this conflict is the second smaller dragon, which always appears. It is of precisely the same form as the larger one, and is also masculine. Whether this smaller dragon, which rushes along on its four feet like a dog, is to be considered as accompanying Merodach or the male Tiamat it is not easy to decide. If the latter he may be connected with Kingu, the husband of Tiamat; if the former, which is perhaps more probable, judging from his position, he may represent the evil winds that assisted Merodach, which would have been represented under the same form as Tiamat; and yet "the helpers of Rahab" who "stoop under" God, in Job 9:13, may be here represented. On a cylinder in the Collection of Sir Henry Peek, described by T. G. Pinches, we seem to see the smaller dragon attacking the larger.

We may further observe that while the Assyrian representa-

tion of this conflict does not tell us whether the dragon was finally slain, or merely subdued and enslaved as in the oldest Babylonian form, yet one would naturally gather that he was killed; as was Tiamat in the Babylonian story which we have in the version which Assurbanipal brought from the southern kingdom; and as we know that the Hebrews of the time of the captivity understood it, Isa. 51:9, "Art not thou he that cut Rahab in pieces, that pierced the dragon?" Cf. Job 26:12, 13.

We have seen that in passing from Babylonia to Assyria the myth of Bel, whether the older or the younger, and the dragon was considerably modified. It was further changed until it was quite confused with another mythological story, that of Gilgamesh



FIG. 14.—The Williams Cylinder.

the mighty hunter. But there was one variation that did not affect the essential meaning of the myth, and that we find on a single small hematite cylinder brought to this country many years ago by Dr. Williams, a missionary in Mardin and Mosul, and presumably obtained in that region. It now belongs to his nephew, Mr. F. Wells Williams, of New Haven, and was first figured and described by me in the *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 1881, p. 226, and copied by Sayce into his edition of Smith's *Chaldean Genesis*, p. 90. The scene (*fig. 14*) is precisely the same as in those already mentioned, except for the very significant substitution of a serpent for the dragon. The god Merodach is the same; he is swiftly pursuing the fleeing serpent, and attacking it with a weapon like a spear, or, rather, a sword with a curved handle that is thrust into the serpent's mouth. Under the body of the god and between his legs is an indeterminate object which takes the place of the smaller dragon. The usual accessories fill the remaining space. This cylinder is convincing proof that in the region where it was made a form of the myth was familiar in

which the spirit of evil was conceived as a serpent, as it is in Genesis, and also in Job 26:13, "His hand hath pierced the swift serpent"; and Isa. 27:1, "In that day Yahve with his sore and great and strong sword shall punish Leviathan, the swift serpent, and Leviathan, the crooked serpent, and he shall slay the dragon that is in the sea." If the Book of Job was composed in one of the lands about Palestine, for example in the land of Uz, we have an indication of the country, where, apart from Palestine, the serpent entered into the myth. I very much doubt whether this cylinder with Merodach and the serpent is Assyrian. It seems to me more probable that it came from further west, possibly from Job's own land. It is not Babylonian, doubtfully Assyrian. It may be that it was an Egyptian influence that controlled the substitution of the serpent for the dragon, as the piercing of the serpent Apepi by the god Horus was frequently represented in Egyptian religious art, and it may thus be that the Persian Ahriman combines the form of the Egyptian Apepi with the idea of the Babylonian Tiamat. An hitherto unpublished Sassanian seal belonging to me, of perhaps 300 or 400 A. D., shows how the idea of the conflict was retained, although the serpent, at this late time, had acquired seven heads,



FIG. 15.—W. H. Ward's Sassanian Seal with Serpent.



FIG. 16.—Metropolitan Museum, 410.

and we have here not so much an echo of the seven-headed beast of Rev. 13:1 as an anticipation of St. George's dragon (*fig. 15*).

The later Assyrian, Hittite, Persian, and other cylinders exhibit great license in the representation of both Merodach and the dragon. The latter very frequently becomes a sphinx, plainly

an Egyptian perversion. It also becomes an ostrich, as in a series of cylinders of which the one best known is that of an Armenian king. Another is given in fig. 16, belonging to the Metropolitan Museum. In this case the smaller dragon has also



FIG. 17.—Cylinder belonging to W. H. Ward.

become an ostrich, although in these altered forms it was usually quite omitted. As an illustration how the scene came to be confused with that of Gilgamesh we may observe fig. 17, a fine cylinder in my own collection, on which, while Merodach retains his characteristic form and weapon, he holds up a bull by the hind leg, quite in the rôle of Gilgamesh.

It would be interesting to trace the stages of transition by which the dragon under its original form when adopted by the



FIG. 18.—L. Heuzey, *Rev. Arch.*, 1895, p. 307.

Hittites passed into an eagle with the head of a lion, and afterwards with two lions' heads, and later two eagles' heads, and how this emblem of the Satanic principles was adopted as a heraldic device by the Seljukian Turks, and how this two-headed eagle is

now honored as their emblem by the Austrians; but this would be aside from our topic, which is the fight between Bel and the dragon. It is sufficient to have traced this most ancient of all pictorial representations of the eternal struggle between good and evil from the very cradle of human civilization and religion, in Eridu and Nippur, to Assyria and the Genesis serpent of Eden, to the dualistic theology of the Avestas, and finally to the great victory of the English St. George over the dragon.

Before concluding this paper attention should be called to an apparently very archaic cylinder (*fig. 18*) given by M. Heuzey in the *Revue Archéologique*, 1895, p. 307. Although M. Heuzey is an authority of the first rank, I should desire that this cylinder, and several others given for the first time in that paper, the present location of which is not stated, might be further studied. This cylinder is a remarkable one, and appears to show us the same details as appear in *figs. 2 and 3*. The design is too admirable and fresh to make it seem possible that it should be a forgery, and the suspicious points about it may be due to the recutting which dealers too often attempt with worn cylinders.